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S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN THE

ABBAY CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER,

ON

JANUARY THE 30th, 1795.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED TO BE OBSERVED AS THE DAY OF THE

MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

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MADAN

BY

SPENCER, LORD BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH.

L O N D O N :

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Desiring 8th February 1797

ORDERED,

By the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parlia-
ment assembled, That the Thanks of this
House be, and are hereby given to the Lord
Bishop of Peterborough, for the Sermon by
him preached before this House on Friday
last, in the Abbey Church, Westminster;
and he is hereby desired to cause the same to
be forthwith printed and published.

GEORGE ROSE, Cler. Parliamentar.

Die Martis 3^o February, 1795.

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By the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House, be, and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of Peterborough, for the Sermon by him preached before this House on Friday last, in the Abbey Church, Westminster; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

GEORGE ROSE, *Cler. Parliamentor.*

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SERMON, &c.

ROMANS xiii. 1.

LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT TO THE HIGHER POWERS,
FOR THERE IS NO POWER BUT OF GOD: THE POWERS
THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD.

THE occasion of this day's solemnity (I am well aware) has sometimes provoked an intemperate zeal, and even false principles of government, from the advocates of monarchy, as well as its opponents. Ashamed of the disgrace, and shocked at the guilt of that occasion (especially at the period which soon happily succeeded in the restoration of a King) it was natural for men to feel the past outrage with acuteness, and to argue against it without due moderation. Their allegiance, so forcibly and so unnaturally thrown aside, was seen to return with a pro-

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portionate degree of eagerness, and their generous impatience to assert and re-establish the violated rights of their Sovereign, added to the long prevalence of habits too favourable to the claims of arbitrary power, became sometimes directed to the defence of doctrines which cannot be too strongly condemned; the warmth of party spirit and the violence of hereditary prejudice have been found unhappily to contaminate with political poison even that pure channel of religious instruction which is exclusively intrusted *in this place* to the Ministers of the Gospel of Peace. At the same time we cannot but observe how frequently and forcibly the importance of secular authority and civil subordination is inculcated in Holy Writ; and therefore it is fair to infer, that it by no means militates against the duties, or derogates from the character of a Christian Minister, to canvass occasionally the several obligations of civil life, with the nature and the interests of that union subsisting between a Prince and his people. Nay it must be obvious, that the great ends of society, in a *religious* point of view, will be very materially promoted by a successful recommendation of those rules of conduct and that system of duty, to which we are expected to conform on principles of *political expediency*.

It shall therefore be the object of my present Discourse—not indeed to offer any violent declamation against the

furious passions of mankind (lamenting however their *iniquitous* effects in the history of this day, "a day of mourning, lamentation and woe")—not indeed to utter an unqualified abuse against the Actors in that Tragedy which we now so justly deplore, or to point out *the excessive guilt* of an offence, which at *all* times cannot but be seen with horror by the meek eye of Religion, and felt with indignation by the warm heart of Loyalty—but rather to deduce some apposite remarks from that unhappy transaction, for the guidance of our own conduct. And perhaps I cannot better enforce a *practical* observance of the precept contained in my text, than by observing in particular, how much our duties become gradually neglected, if not fatally forgotten, even by the honest and well-meaning part of the community, whenever they unthinkingly connect themselves with men of a seditious or disaffected temper. Rather let us say with the dying Patriarch of old, "O my soul come not thou into their secret, unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." I would briefly observe with a more *direct* attention to the words of the text, that nothing but a *wilful* misrepresentation of their meaning can render an explanation necessary. No liberal or candid Commentator would require me to tell you in express terms (what the common sense and feelings of every individual cannot fail to supply) that it by no

means enjoins an abject submission to every species of power, whether legally or illegally appointed, which an arbitrary governour may think proper to *arrogate*, and may daringly presume to exert—but that it merely intends a dutiful respect and obedience to our civil superiors, in all things *lawful* and *honest*, in all things not injurious to the essential rights of mankind, or repugnant to the laws of God. Is not this (as has been well observed) sufficiently enforced by the example of Daniel, when acting in defiance of the proud mandate of Darius? Is not this sufficiently established by the conduct of those pious Jews who braved the fury of the hottest furnace, and dared the utmost indignation of a blasphemous tyrant? Is not this most clearly and fully explained by that express declaration of St. Peter and of the other Apostles, when brought before the Jewish Council, and threatened with even death itself by the haughty members of the Sanhedrim? “We ought,” said Peter and those other Apostles, “to obey God rather than
“man.”

Is it then a possible mistake, in this enlightened age, and still more especially in this enlightened nation, where the prerogative of Princes and the liberty of subjects are at once so ably guarded and so fully ascertained—Is it then a possible mistake, that a *blind*, *implicit*, and *unlimited* subjection to any casual, unlawful, or arbitrary possessor of
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the seat of power, should ever be proposed as a precept of the Gospel; or inculcated, *as such*, by any of its Ministers? For my own part, I reprobate the idea whilst I despise the insinuation. No man can be required to be *told* that the utmost intention of the text, and of all similar passages in Scripture, whenever they occur, can only be adduced or intended in support of *just* authority, and for the enforcement of a *proper* subordination and obedience.

That the persons of Kings ought to be revered with all due submission, and that we can never be justified in making any attempts upon their lives, is a position unquestionably true, and ever to be maintained with zeal and firmness; but then it by no means follows as a consequence (as some have absurdly and ignorantly inferred) that it is likewise criminal to oppose any of their measures, however arbitrary or illegal, however contrary to and destructive of the well-being of their people—for when a country is once brought to the brink of ruin by mal-administration, either through the weakness or wickedness of a King, however sacred and inviolable his person is, and *ought* to be held, yet surely his ruinous and destructive measures may be opposed and over-ruled, consistently with all laws, natural and divine; or else, how are those principles to be defended on which our glorious Revolution itself was wrought by his Majesty King William the third, and on which our present happy establishment

establishment is founded? Still we must allow, that in the several historical relations of human affairs delivered down to us through a long series of ages, it plainly appears, that from the very first establishment of any Magistrate or Supreme Governor over the multitude, *Kings* were ever looked upon with peculiar awe and veneration, were constantly held in the highest degree of estimation and honour—they were universally approached by their subjects with tokens of the most profound humility, with every possible mark of outward respect as well as inward reverence—their persons were generally deemed sacred and inviolable—nay, to such an enormous height (or rather I should say to such an extravagance of folly) was this very idea carried amongst some blind and infatuated nations of the Heathen World, that they actually proceeded so far, as to cause even *divine* honours to be paid them.—Now, however absurd, wrong, nay impious this notion might be, however blameable such an excess of humiliation from man to man, nevertheless, upon our consulting the revealed Will of God, we shall easily perceive, that all who profess themselves Christians are required to demean themselves towards those “who are set in authority over them” with the utmost humility, as well as the highest respect, both in their words and actions. The very same sentence that binds it upon our conscience “to fear God” at the same time equally commands

commands it as our duty "to honour the King." With respect to our allegiance *here*, St. Paul plainly and sufficiently instructs us, "Let every soul," let every member of a community, "be subject to the higher powers,"—to the lawful and appointed governors.—Here then is the rule,—neither is there any thing contained in this rule which reason does not dictate and policy demand ;—but when the Apostle gives us the *ground* of this subjection, "There is "no power but of God," the text is indeed very awful and emphatical. Men, in a state of mere reason (or *what is called reason* by themselves) are found, from history and experience, to argue that public power is a thing so absolutely of their *own* creation, that they may annihilate and destroy it at pleasure ; every slight dissatisfaction is then a plea sufficient for all such reasoners to *resist*, and the practice founded on an argument so false, but alas ! so palatable to the pride of the weak, and so convenient to the views of the ambitious or the turbulent, is alike fatal to all private security and all public prosperity ! Every good man, every peaceable citizen, every pious Christian, cannot but deplore and reprobate such a shameful abuse of reason, such a mistaken inference ;—"Rulers (he will say with the "Apostle) are not a terror to good works, but to the evil ; "they are for the punishment of wicked doers, but for the "praise (and protection) of them that do well." He will consider

consider government or *power* (according to what St. Paul terms it) “an ordinance of God, the Minister of God to thee for good, if thou do that which is good; but the Minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil; wherefore we must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience sake.” Is obedience then (it may be asked) to the Civil Magistrate, and consequently are public peace and happiness, which are so intimately connected with that obedience, secured and promoted upon principles of mere reason, and not further enforced by the argument suggested by the Scriptures? Does Christianity lay no *additional* obligations upon subjects, as also upon Magistrates, to perform respectively their important duties? It is surely of *some* value to understand the true end of so material an institution, the *future* as well as the *present* purposes of government.—Policy and reflection indeed could enable the first law-givers of each Heathen State, to bind the hands and restrain the conduct of unruly individuals, but Christianity goes *much farther*, it takes in a much *larger* compass of action, it affects the heart, (the root or spring of *all* action) and consequently gains a much firmer and more durable hold.

We perceive then, I trust, that there is something in the Christian precepts respecting our obedience to the higher powers of a peculiar and appropriate excellence: that there

is really a far greater perfection in Christian than in Pagan principles of allegiance, and that, consequently, in a public as well as private point of view, our most Holy Religion is replete with the richest and choicest blessings.

That government from the first institution of it amongst mankind, was altogether intended for the security and happiness of the people, and is therefore to be held in the highest reverence, to be ever esteemed a most invaluable blessing, is, I believe, a point so universally agreed upon, that it would be found perhaps one of the greatest difficulties in the world, to meet with any individual subject of it, either absurd or obstinate enough, to make it a matter of disputation or argument. Any one state left to itself to float at all adventures, without due order or justice to guide and regulate its several parts, could not but exhibit to every serious and reflecting mind a scene of the utmost wretchedness and misery; where property has no friendly hand to protect her, where alas! on the contrary, she lies open and exposed to the rapacious grasp of every bold invader, where the very lives of men are equally insecure with their possessions, where each particular person follows, without restraint, the bent of his own rude inclinations (however cruel and injurious to his neighbours) and thereby becomes instead of a friend to society (as he was primarily intended to be by the God of all order, the

Divine Source of Benevolence and Love) the author of all violence, and the most inveterate enemy to his fellow-creatures. The complicated miseries of such a comfortless and forlorn state as this, soon occurred to the notice of the very earliest ages, and immediately engaged the attention of mankind. They were of course, and as it were *necessarily* led, to form themselves into regular and well-ordered societies, and to select those from among the generality, in whom they could observe any peculiar eminence, either of mental ability, or of virtuous practice, in whose hands, and under whose guidance and directions, they might securely lodge their best and dearest interests, and consequently, whose government over them they acknowledged with confidence, and submitted to with cheerfulness. From hence a degree of order and civilization prevailed among the families and nations of the world, and so far shed its blessed influence over the sons of men, as not only to disarm them of their former savageness and brutality towards each other, but even to lead them on to the guardianship and protection of the weak and helpless part of the community, against the violence of the bold and headstrong, against "the fury of the oppressor."

The true end of government is then confessedly the general welfare and happiness of the people, and if any thing can be wanting to point out its inestimable value,

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and that train of blessings and comforts which are most assuredly its constant attendants, we have only to turn our eyes for a while towards those states where anarchy and confusion prevail, of which we have a striking, and a no less melancholy instance, in the present situation of the French nation. With this in view, surely the distinguished blessings of a regular and well-established government, wherein wholesome and good laws are duly and impartially executed (the true end and design of which is to promote the interests and secure the happiness of the community in general) cannot fail to excite more and more our admiration, and inflame our love—seeing, that to *this* we are indebted for the security of our persons and our property; *without this*, our strongest dependences are built but on a sandy foundation, and are continually liable to dissolution; hereby, the daring encroachments of the proud are happily checked and restrained, and, however menacing and desperate their inclinations may appear, still, nevertheless, their “mouth is held, as it were, with a bridle, and the “wicked dare not approach to hurt us;”—however headstrong and inflated with insolence they may shew themselves, still are they obliged to start back, and shrink from any invasion of those rights and privileges which we have in common with themselves. Thus every member of the community is equally at full liberty to enjoy his own (be

be it little or much) and "to rejoice in the fruit of his labours," without fear of molestation or hindrance from any quarter; free from the arbitrary injunctions of despotic rule, no longer trembling under the iron hand of lawless power, as a member of the state secured from the yoke of civil tyranny, as a member of the church protected in the free exercise of his religious sentiments and principles. Such are the inestimable blessings, and substantial privileges arising from the due administration of every legal government; where the interests of the Monarch on the throne, and the people over whom he is the appointed Magistrate, are but *one and the same*; where there subsists a reciprocal tie and obligation upon each, to devise and promote their mutual welfare and happiness; where tender solicitude and generous protection on the one part, gives the strongest claim to love, duty, and obedience on the other. But there can be little occasion to say any thing further upon the extreme happiness of a people, who are living under such a state as is here represented; the more we search into and examine all its different parts, the more ardent must be our love and admiration of it,—no language can give it ornament,—no argument can be wanting to recommend it. Happy we of this nation and country who have so long experienced its invaluable blessings! inasmuch, that nothing surely can now be wanting to render it unspeakably

dear and precious in our estimation, to attach us daily more and more to the best and wisest constitution in the world; which, though often endangered through the vile artifices and wicked designs of factious men, has notwithstanding (blessed be God for it!) been as often wonderfully delivered and preserved to us, by signal marks and interpositions of his over-ruling Providence, and which, we still humbly hope and firmly trust, strongly relying on the same powerful means of protection, will be continued to us in all its genuine strength and vigour under the mild and gracious government of a Prince, whose natural disposition (as appears from the very beginning of his reign over us) was more particularly formed and calculated to render us a happy people, and who has made it a constant and invariable rule of his administration, to exhibit himself rather in the light, and under the character, of our *Father* and Guardian, than of our *King* and Governor.

It being then sufficiently clear, that government is not only convenient and comfortable, but indeed absolutely *necessary* for the welfare and happiness of mankind in general, and that our *own* government in particular (so finely constituted as it is, so nicely poised and wisely adjusted in every part) is replete with blessings and advantages beyond all comparison, it cannot but afford us the deepest concern, whensoever we look back to those *dark* times,

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when the unfortunate Monarch (whose cruel sufferings and foul murder we this day commemorate with mourning and weeping) wielded the sceptre of his ancestors—for, notwithstanding all our partiality to him as a *man*, whose private virtues were numerous and great, and who, in many instances of the most serious importance, shone forth an eminent and bright example to the world, yet surely we can never be so blind to his failings and imperfections, as not readily to admit, that in some *other* instances he shewed himself too fatally disposed to violate the rights and privileges of his subjects beyond what they could well bear. Instances of this kind are so very well known, and have been so frequently appealed to and allowed in former Discourses from this place, that it would be needless and impertinent to repeat them. And yet however culpable in *these* respects the conduct of the Royal Martyr may have been, surely every fair and candid mind will naturally be led to make great allowances in his favour;—surely, if we will but give ourselves time to reflect, duly and properly, on those first principles and habits into which he was initiated from his earliest infancy, and those strong examples he had continually and so forcibly presenting themselves to his view, of arbitrary and despotic sway, in several of his predecessors on the throne (whose history abundantly informs us, how prone they were, how fatally inclined to make

make their *own will* the *law*) can we be surprized that *he* also should be disposed (too frequently alas!) to tread in the same destructive steps? This was certainly but natural, it was indeed almost unavoidable. Add to this, that we know from the volume of all history, there are too often those to be seen encompassing the throne, who merely from base and degenerate views of their own private interests, from an eager thirst after the attainment of either wealth, or honours, almost at *any* rate or price, are ever ready to mislead, and seduce a Prince from the plain path of his duty towards those over whom he is the appointed Governour, to buoy him up in the pursuit of wrong and desperate measures, and finally to flatter him to his very ruin.

However, notwithstanding the several false steps which this ill-fated Monarch was led into, through mis-conceived notions of kingly power, and the many grievous errors of his government, what degree of criminality, considering all circumstances, fairly and impartially, can, after all, be imputed to him, in comparison with that which may with much more propriety and justice be attributed to those, who, after refusing to accept all his concessions (however humiliating to himself, however grating and repugnant to his own private feelings) in favour of his subjects, still treated him with such a barbarous degree of ignominy and
I. contempt,

contempt, with such an unparalleled series of bitter hardships and cruelties, and in the end, conspiring against his *very life*, never withheld their malignant hands from persecution, till they had actually deprived him of it. A tragical event of the same sanguinary complexion (too horrible to dwell upon) we have lived to see accomplished in a neighbouring country, with (if possible) *accumulated* degrees of brutal savageness and barbarity.—Are we led to inquire what is become of the chief actors in this dreadful scene? Behold them all (as it seems by a very remarkable Providence) swept off from the face of the earth almost to a man! “Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright *“are thy judgments.”* Ps. cxix. 137. “For the work of *“a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to *“find according to his ways.”* Job xxxiv. 11. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” Rom. xii. 19.*

I come now to apply, in conclusion, what has been thus offered, as an apposite and useful method of enforcing that duty which the text enjoins.—I shall briefly, but earnestly, exhort you to a cautious and a temperate line of public conduct; that the sad experience of this day may at *all* times effectually secure us from hazarding those blessings *which we now so happily enjoy!* That we never may
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expose to the violence of an *open invader*, or to the artifice and machinations of a *secret enemy*, the invaluable treasure of our civil and religious liberty! Could the mistaken abettors of that rebellion which ended in the guilty transaction of this day, have foreseen from the beginning the whole scope and consequence of their proceedings, could they when they first espied “the *little cloud*,” as it were, “arising from the sea like a man’s hand,” could they have foreseen at that time what winds and storms were thenceforth gathering,—could they have embraced at one view, the confusion of a long war, the desolation of a flourishing kingdom, and the shock experienced by the sacred Temple of Religion;—could they have been *then* convinced that the measures which they fatally pursued would naturally terminate in the total loss of their civil rights, that the intire frame of the government would be of course dreadfully shattered and at length destroyed; that the wise and wholesome constitution of Parliaments would be utterly overthrown;—could they have foreknown that their *too violent* resistance against their lawful Prince would have rendered them slaves to an unlawful Despot—that the weapons entrusted to a band of mercenary men would be finally pointed against themselves—surely such a train of evils, such a dreadful scene of miseries and of punishments, would have had its due effect in preventing the commence-

ment of that conflagration which rages so suddenly superior to all controul!

Happily for *us* at *this* day, our duty is as easy as it is indispensable! Nevertheless, we cannot be too often cautioned, as well from the reason and experience of that duty, as from the gross violation of it which *former times* have seen (to say nothing of the factious temper of many *living* individuals) we cannot be too often cautioned against the poison of seditious principles; that our *envied, unexampled* establishment, both in Church and State, may never be *again* endangered! May *we* better understand and know our happiness, and better practise our several duties! To this end may *we* cultivate above *every other object* a due sense of religion, and a practical observance of those golden precepts, which were promulgated to the world by the mouth of him “who spake as never man spake,” the divine and adorable Jesus.

A perfection of obedience towards God (so far as this is consistent with our natural corruptions and infirmities) *universally prevailing* amongst us, implies in its notion such integrity of moral conduct in the members of society, that it would infallibly produce a perfection of *social happiness*: it would banish the ill spirit of ambition—it would check the outrage of discontented faction—it would sheath on the one hand the *sword* of *tyranny*, and extinguish on the other hand

hand the *flame of rebellion* ! It would cherish, in a word, and effectually promote the growth of all those Christian charities and virtues which are so intimately connected with the duties, and so highly essential to the interests of civil life. So certain is it, and beyond all dispute, that Peace and Happiness, Loyalty and Religion, Civil Order and Christian Piety, are *naturally and properly united*. God Almighty dispose our hearts ever to preserve the union of these *near and fit* companions (more especially as we are *now* circumstanced) by *honouring* the best of earthly Kings, and *fearing* the King of Heaven ! May he so direct and influence the people of this land, whether those who shall be placed above us (for the exercise of his Ministry, as well Temporal as Spiritual, for the Administration of our Laws, as well Human as Divine) or those whose lower stations and subordinate ranks in life may induce less arduous, perhaps *not less* important duties !—May he so direct and influence all orders and degrees amongst us, the *Rulers* and the *ruled*, with a true love of Holiness, Integrity, and Justice, Sobriety, Honesty, and all Christian Virtue, that each, in his respective sphere, may keep stedfastly in view the honour of God, and the good of all mankind, in compliance with those incomparable rules which that God himself hath taught us. Possessing, as we do, an unrivalled system of civil and sacred institutions to secure true and

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rational Liberty, to maintain just Government, and to inculcate pure Religion, may this nation be rendered, through the loyalty and piety of its inhabitants (as the Prophet Jeremiah so powerfully describes Jerusalem) “ the Perfection of Beauty, and the Joy of the whole Earth !”
Jerem. Lament. ii. 15.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (all Glorious and ever Blessed Trinity) be ascribed, as is most due from every thing that hath breath and being, all honour, and glory, praise, thanksgiving, and obedience, now, henceforth, and for evermore—Amen !

FINIS.